

Fall 2020 Planning Group Final Report

Introduction

On April 23, 2020, Provost Carbajal convened a planning group to study options and if possible make a recommendation regarding course delivery for Fall Quarter 2020. The specific goal of the group as articulated by the Provost was:

The President and vice presidents are particularly interested in receiving from the group a list of options for Fall Quarter operations, with pros and cons listed, if not necessarily an actual recommendation on a decision.

The group was formed by Associate Vice President Brian Burton. Its members were:

- Adah Barenburg, AS Senate Pro Tempore
- Rich Brown, President, United Faculty of Western Washington and Professor of Theatre
- Faye Gallant, Executive Director, Budget and Financial Planning
- Maria Paredes Mendez, Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences
- Michael Sledge, Associate Dean of Students
- Robert Squires, Vice Provost, Outreach and Continuing Education
- Jeff Young, President, Faculty Senate and Professor of Biology

As a first task, we developed a set of guiding principles, as follows:

1. The most important goal is to protect as much as possible the health of students, staff, and faculty.
2. Other important goals (in this order):
 - a. To provide an education as close as possible to the Western education we have known.
 - b. To be able to teach as many students as want to attend Western.
3. A constraint:
 - a. To be financially viable.

The group also developed a set of objectives to work through in attaining our goal. The first objective was to determine the conditions that would affect Western's ability to deliver at least some on-campus instruction in Fall 2020.

Absolute Condition

What we called the "absolute condition" was the state of the pandemic at the time of fall quarter. Although this is unknowable, we wanted to acknowledge that only under relatively benign conditions—a declining rate of infections and deaths in the nation, the state of Washington, and Whatcom County—could we consider face-to-face activity in Fall Quarter. In an increasingly dangerous environment, it likely would be the case that restrictions being eased as of this writing would return, and even if not, the

moral imperative of safety that has been our first guiding principle would dictate a continuation of online-only instruction.

Primary Conditions

After that, the group identified five “primary conditions,” those that needed to be fulfilled for some on-campus instruction to resume for fall quarter and that could guide the nature and extent of that instruction. They are:

1. Adequate testing capability, including availability of tests and testing facilities and prompt response times;
2. Adequate numbers of trained contact tracers;
3. Adequate capacity (space and services) for separation (self-isolation or self-quarantine);
4. Ability to distance according to then-current guidelines;
5. Capacity and policies for students, staff, and faculty who need to work or study from remote locations.

The group looked at testing, tracing, and supported isolation (TTSI) capacity as the most important factor in determining what can be offered on-campus, with distancing guidelines as a limiting factor once TTSI capacity is determined. Students, staff, and faculty would need to be tested before their arrival on campus and periodically afterward. Opening campus to any significant degree without pre-arrival testing would expose potentially thousands of people to asymptomatic carriers immediately, putting health and potentially lives in danger. Therefore, we cannot recommend any option that does not include pre-arrival or on-arrival testing and periodic testing of the entire population after arrival. To be able to do this, we need to have sufficient testing kits and processing capacity, at Western and in Whatcom County.

Testing alone will not stop Covid-19 from entering Western’s community. Therefore the ability to trace contacts of all people testing positive will be vital. Given Covid-19’s behavior, it is likely that for every individual who tests positive there may be hundreds of contacts. Each of those individuals will need to be tested quickly, and so on. The reason this is important is the final step, supported isolation of positive cases.

Even with TTSI, it is likely that distancing guidelines will be in place to limit transmission into the fall.

Education is especially likely to continue with distancing guidelines; one report

https://ethics.harvard.edu/files/center-for-ethics/files/roadmaptopandemicresilience_updated_4.20.20_0.pdf that advocates TTSI lists education as the last sector to return to normal operations; even its very aggressive timetable for massive testing and reopening doesn’t have schools reopening as normal until August. It’s likely that timetable will not be followed, thus mandating some form of distancing such as limiting large gatherings (such as classes). Any distancing guidelines will have a substantial impact on the offering of courses on campus.

Even if distancing guidelines are relaxed and TTSI is in place, we anticipate that many individuals will be prevented from coming to campus for instructional purposes for various reasons—not only medical in the sense of the CDC risk categories, but also because of fear or anxiety, needing to care for people in vulnerable populations or children in the absence of child care, or economic reasons. These individuals,

whether students, staff, or faculty, must be considered and accommodated in any opening of Western's campus.

Secondary Conditions

Also, the group identified three "secondary conditions" that may impose or increase limits to on-campus instruction:

1. Adequate health-care capacity in Whatcom County;
2. Adequate supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE);
3. Adequate cleaning and disinfecting capacity.

Health-care capacity in the county needs to be able to handle a surge of seriously ill patients, as well as increased numbers of patient visits to primary care facilities. The latter has significant impact for Western's Student Health Center.

Adequate PPE to follow guidelines assumes that some will be used routinely (for example, masks and gloves in high contact areas and for custodial employees) and some will be used at need. The amount needed is highly variable depending on many issues, not least including the type of PPE used; for example, if people have reusable masks, initial resource needs may be high but concerns about the long-term supply chain would be lessened.

Cleaning and disinfecting capacity, including both personnel and supplies, is another high-variance condition. Even with all-online course delivery between 300 and 500 people are on campus every day, and many buildings already need to be cleaned at some level. As building use increases, however, the need to both clean and disinfect increases quickly.

Emergency Conditions

Finally, in addition to those conditions, we identified two more as needing to be met in the event of emergencies to be confident in delivering some instruction on campus at the start of Fall Quarter:

1. Ability to quickly move to all-online instruction during the quarter;
2. Ability to quickly clean and disinfect multiple buildings in the event of contamination.

Two emergency scenarios arise related to Covid-19. One is a fall wave of infections that would require an urgent closure of campus. The other is the presence in one or more buildings of infected individuals that causes the temporary closure of those buildings. The first scenario would cause Western to shift instruction quickly to online, along with all support services. The second would cause any on-campus courses using the closed buildings to be moved temporarily while the cleaning and disinfecting occurs.

Subject Matter Expert Input

The group asked subject matter experts for views on all primary, secondary, and emergency conditions. A summary of their responses follows.

- Testing Capability

- The most recent information is that WWU and Whatcom County Department of Health currently believe they will have the capacity to test students periodically during the year. Current public health guidelines that do not call for the testing of asymptomatic individuals, although this might change.
- Contact Tracing Capacity
 - Contact training capacity is an area of emphasis in the state, and Whatcom County Department of Health currently expects that by fall capacity will be in place to handle the amount of tracing necessary for Western students.
- Self-Isolation Capacity
 - Western's plan is to isolate in place for students in dorms, and that students in off-campus housing would self-isolate or be referred by a health-care provider to Whatcom County's self-isolation facilities.
- Distancing Capacity
 - Whatcom Health and WWU health experts both caution that at the very least plans need to allow for the possibility of distancing in fall (and until an effective vaccine is widely available). This is a binding and significant constraint on both dorm population and in-person class sizes. For example, University Residences would about halve its capacity under distancing guidelines, with one student per room being the planned capacity in dorms.
- High-Risk Populations
 - Human Resources reports some requests for employee accommodation due to being in high-risk categories and expects the number of these requests to increase as more units are allowed back to work, but this should not be a problem from an HR viewpoint, and current policies should cover more employees.
 - ITS believes it would be difficult currently to source laptops for all employees, but desktops could continue to be used at home, and keyboards and mice could be taken home for use with home or work laptops. Internet connectivity issues can be resolved through the purchase of hotspot devices. Several software and cloud service initiatives could be initiated to ease working from home (Voice-over IP, moving from P drive to OneDrive, Zoom licenses, moving from Zoom to Teams over time, etc.)
- Health-Care Capacity
 - There seems to be no real concern about health-care capacity, including hospital beds, currently.
- Supplies
 - Guidance from ICS currently is not to provide students with masks or gloves.
 - Sanitizer and wipes currently seem available in bulk, but containers for both are in short supply.
- Cleaning/Disinfecting Capacity
 - Current custodial capacity is not sufficient to clean and disinfect campus buildings with normal or close to normal use. However, such capacity can be scaled relatively quickly.
- Moving to Online in an Emergency
 - For students, ATUS has loaned about 300 laptops to students for the spring, some of which were for student employees. WWU is looking at the possibility of partnering with Microsoft to provide devices for high-need students.

- For faculty, technology issues are similar to comments above concerning high-risk populations. Because the vast majority of faculty will have taught online during spring, an emergency pivot likely would take some time but not be as problematic in fall.
- Emergency Cleaning
 - WWU has the capacity to emergency-clean one building at a time with current levels of custodians. Outside emergency cleaning services are available but difficult to obtain and expensive.

Options for Course Delivery

The group began its examination of course delivery options with a list of 15 scenarios from a blog on Inside Higher Ed. Pros and cons of each option, along with their feasibility, were examined.

Overall Recommendation

We believe it may be possible to hold some classes in person in fall quarter. This number will be relatively small for several reasons, including distancing guidelines as well as the ability to clean and disinfect to enhance safety and health. All large classes and most classes overall will need to be online only; all classes will need online options for equity reasons. Criteria for selecting classes to be taught in person will need to be developed, and scheduling options must be developed to ensure the largest number of students can take classes on campus under public health guidance and TTSI limitations.

Options Not Recommended

We considered the cons of some options so significant as to eliminate them quickly:

Normal Quarter

We believe it is far too risky, in any sense, to plan to open Fall 2020 with complete face-to-face instruction and using actual room capacities. Foremost is the likelihood of a second wave of infections and/or imposed restrictions. Also, there seems to be a very small likelihood that all social distancing guidelines will not be in place in Fall.

Delay Quarter Start by a Short Period

We believe very little can be gained by a delay short enough to still allow for a relatively complete quarter (this might be more possible for a semester school). This might make sense if, as with spring, a chosen option needed lead time in the fall; however, it likely would be very unpopular with students, who would be paying normal tuition for a shorter quarter.

Start in Winter Quarter

We believe this option is problematic because of its effect on revenue (either academic year or summer) and faculty pay. It might be possible if several contingencies lined up, but it still would carry a substantial financial burden.

Only First-Year Students Taking Courses on Campus

We see this option as problematic for many reasons. It would not be easy to implement; it likely would lead to a smaller freshman class than desired or even necessary unless some freshman were not taking courses on campus, leading to equity/selection issues; freshmen are most likely to take large classes that would not be offered in person anyway; it would be difficult to implement and may wind up having

a bait-and-switch feel given that we wouldn't have time before any announcement to design the first-year program.

Offer a Block Schedule

This option is not a block schedule as Western has it, but a schedule where courses are taught in short, intensive blocks. It is an example of a bias in the blog toward options that might work at smaller institutions, such as Beloit College, which has moved to a block schedule approach. In some disciplines this might work, and a coordinated or cohort schedule might allow for efficiency, but it would be difficult logistically to implement in the time we have at a school like Western. Equity issues concerning access could arise with this option because some students may not be able to come to campus for intensive sessions.

All Remote

This rejection is more tentative than the previous four. There is some sentiment to turn to this option; it is the cleanest and safest option. However, the majority of the group believes some classes can be offered safely in person. Also, it is at least possible that choosing to go all remote in fall would be choosing to go all remote for the entire year because of housing choices students might be forced to make. This option should be planned for by all faculty, however, in the event of an emergency that requires the closure of the University's physical spaces. We also believe we should take advantage of the time between now and the beginning of fall quarter to support faculty who choose to enhance their online courses to provide a more robust learning experience for their students. This would require planning, providing both opportunities for training and resources to compensate faculty for training that would most likely happen during the summer, when they are not on contract.

Options for Possible Adoption

We could not recommend any one option as the sole approach to course delivery in Fall 2020. However, several approaches should be considered, and we believe a modified version of one approach is mandatory for equity reasons. That option is listed here first.

Courses are Taught Online and Face-to-Face at the Same Time

This is, as presented in the Inside Higher Ed blog, essentially the HyFlex system of linking online and in-person elements of a class. We do not believe this system is viable for Western as a whole because of its resource-intensive nature. However, we believe it vital that all in-person courses be accessible online for those who cannot come to campus, and a HyFlex-type approach should be considered by faculty where appropriate.

Ensure Some Targeted Populations Have Classes on Campus

This approach could be used for certain populations, such as graduate students or the Honors program. Both populations mentioned here have small class sizes, allowing them to fit into rooms with reduced capacity. Both also are populations Western is interested in increasing. There is a question as to whether we are putting a targeted population at risk by having them be on campus a significant amount of time.

Offer Experiential Credit

This approach could be used by departments that already offer significant internship-type experiences. Essentially it would be a ramping up of opportunities and credits for those opportunities, with resulting temporary changes in major requirements. This option would be difficult to apply across the university

because of problems with the supply of sites during the pandemic; also, some departments do not have a history of offering credit for such experiences often and so might struggle to develop them.

Offer Only Selected or Targeted Classes on Campus

We do not believe Western has the facilities or the depth in one particular type of class besides lecture-based instruction to use this as a sole approach. However, it is one aspect of the approach Eastern is taking; it is identifying courses that are difficult or impossible to teach online and offering them on campus. Similarly, Western could identify such courses as part of its course delivery for Fall 2020. Examples would be lab, studio, and performance-based courses, particularly at the upper divisions where creative scheduling could allow all students time on campus. These courses, especially lab courses, do pose an additional burden on custodial staff to keep them safe. A version of this option is presented as another option in the Inside Higher Ed blog; to offer the maximum number of classes possible under public health guidelines on campus, with the rest online. We are not sure what a maximum number means, but we believe that classes that meet criteria could be offered on campus up to the reduced capacity enforced by public health guidelines and TTSI limitations.

Offer High Demand Courses in Response to Covid 19

Under this approach, a variation of the previous option, Western would identify and offer courses that require face-to-face instruction and may be deemed critical in the current economic and health crisis. Students preparing for service to their communities or for jobs in the near-term economy may seek these courses. Due to their practical value, such classes may be exempted from any state restrictions on face-to-face instruction in what may otherwise be limiting conditions.

Offer Courses in a Modular Format

This option breaks existing courses into modules that can be completed over time but not necessarily continuously as in a regular course. It seems designed most for emergencies where courses must stop for a period of time and so might be appropriate to consider for lab science courses or those with similar attributes, where restrictions or building closure might affect the ability to deliver the course in person. We see curricular issues such as the length of time completion of a module would count and how to handle grades across quarters, particularly with relevance to financial aid. Equity issues concerning student ability to attend campus for a short period of time or have an equivalent experience should also be considered.

Offer Online Classes but with On-Campus Co-Curricular Activities'

This option—to have all classes online but to allow co-curricular activities on campus in adherence to public health guidelines—seems possible, but if students are allowed on campus for co-curricular activities, it seems reasonable to allow some classes to be taught in person as well. We have equity concerns with the differential experience of those who cannot come to campus with this and so would not recommend it. We list it in this section because we do think it is possible to organize co-curricular activities with proper distancing, although the tendency to gather among college-age students must be considered in such organization.

Students Have Intensive On-Campus Experiences in Addition to Online Coursework

This option would allow at least some campus access for students in an otherwise all-online quarter. It might be appropriate for freshmen, as expecting all freshmen to live in Bellingham for the entire quarter is unrealistic given the distancing requirements limiting dorm occupancy. Planning would be difficult,

and the nature of the on-campus experience given public health guidance, and the fact that students likely would be taking all-quarter online classes, would need to be carefully thought through. There may be equity issues if some members of the cohort cannot attend campus for that time period.

Tutorial Model

This option essentially is a large-scale flipping of the classroom. Although difficult to implement for a broad range of courses for scheduling and capacity reasons, it is a valid option for many courses through creative scheduling such as splitting the class into cohorts who come to campus one day a week or taking advantage of lower room capacity to have the on-campus sessions spread out during the day. It is likely to be resource intensive because it may increase an instructor's overall contact hours, depending on the nature of the online instruction and the scheduling option chosen.

Conclusion

As a group we believe all Western's classes should be available for online participation in Fall 2020. We also believe that most faculty should design classes for the online environment. However, this does not mean we think an all-remote quarter should be the fall experience. Instead we believe for equity reasons it is important to have online options for all courses taught. We do believe the combination of graduate and Honors classes, classes difficult to teach online (assuming safety can be addressed), and flipped classes is a population from which on-campus courses (with options for online participation) could be chosen. Also, we believe some type of on-campus experience for all first-year students is desirable, if it can be designed. Criteria for on-campus classes must include size because of distancing limits and also should include safety, equity, and experiential considerations at minimum. Other criteria should be examined by colleges and departments in the process of deciding the nature of their schedules. The schedule likely will not be able to be resolved fully by the start of Fall 2020 registration, but some indications (such as the online nature of all large courses) could be given in ClassFinder.

This is predicated on the University's and Whatcom Department of Health's ability to screen, test, and contact trace at an appropriate level. If this is not possible, moving to an all-remote schedule until such time as such capacity exists would be a safety imperative.

We also recommend that resources be devoted to improving the online teaching and learning experience. This likely will affect faculty workload, which will need to be a point of discussion between the University and the UFWW. In providing this experience we will better be able to differentiate Western from the various options available to students, including students taking a gap year, enrolling in an online university, or enrolling at a community college—a critical marketing and information component of retaining both continuing and incoming students.

Financial Viability

This recommendation has some costs, but fewer than might be anticipated, and may limit lost revenue in some ways.

Costs

Costs involved in these options are not large compared to the lost revenues associated with the pandemic, and there are more options for funding these costs than there are for replacing lost revenue. Costs involved in on-campus teaching and learning could include personal protective equipment (PPE), the cost of testing, tracing, and isolating those who test positive, cleaning and disinfecting supplies and

personnel, technology solutions, and the cost of preparing classrooms under distancing guidelines. However, some of these costs will not be borne by the university. Public health guidelines do not indicate that masks or gloves need be worn by students, as determined by Sue Sullivan. The costs of testing largely would be borne by students' insurance; the cost of contact tracing would be borne by the Whatcom County Department of Health. The cost of isolation, under the preferred plan of University Residences, would be little because Covid-positive students would shelter in place. The cost of cleaning and disinfecting supplies, primarily disinfectant spray as more efficient than wipes, is unknown to us at this time, although the costs are being examined. Additional personnel needed to provide the recommended level of cleaning are estimated to cost about \$10,000 per week for three cleanings per day of all classrooms and primarily would be students, helping some students who may have lost their jobs because of the economy. Webcams in classrooms to enable online participation in on-campus classes would cost between \$5,000 and \$7,000 and are on order already based on the winter/spring response. If the University provides hotspots for faculty and students with insufficient connectivity, the cost is \$40 per month per hotspot. Some additional laptops may be necessary for both faculty and students; it would be worth exploring this issue with Microsoft, which recently partnered with Morehouse College to provide Surface tablet/laptops to all incoming students. We would not recommend that, but some support for needy students may be available. The most costly aspects likely would include support for faculty to develop and deliver quality online experiences for students, additional storage for those items that would need to be removed from classrooms to comply with social distancing guidelines, possibly a Zoom site license (around \$40,000), and the engagement of Facilities Management and Transport Services to set up classrooms for distancing and store excess furniture.

Lost Revenues

Potential lost revenues from Covid-19 include lost tuition, reductions in mandatory fees, and loss of auxiliary revenue (primarily housing, dining, and bookstore). However, with courses being taught on campus as well as online, some of these losses will themselves be lessened. For example, residence halls may lose as much 50% of fall revenue, but that is better than an all-remote quarter that may mean (as in spring) a 90% loss. Similar losses would be expected in dining, with a 25% loss estimated in retail and catering, but again this is less than the expectation in an all-remote quarter. Bookstore revenue may be down as much as 30% in fall, but with fewer materials needing to be shipped, losses may be minimized. Finally, such an approach might limit tuition losses as returning students see the possibility of some on-campus learning and first-year students have the opportunity for at least some on-campus time.

Conclusion

As a group, we very much appreciate the opportunity to make recommendations on such an important decision as the course-delivery method for Fall 2020. We hope this report will be helpful to you in making that decision, and we will be happy to answer any questions you might have.